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# Creative Synthesis: Collaborative Cross Disciplinary Studies in the Arts

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# **Creative Synthesis: Collaborative Cross Disciplinary Studies in the Arts**

By

Ermine Todd IV

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for Graduation from the  
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Professor Darryl Thomas  
Thesis Advisor

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## **Developing a Concept**

I began this project in an attempt to better understand the relationship between the choreographer, the composer, the director, and the performer. A performance requires the collaborative influence of all of these individuals in order to achieve success and I sought to explore each role individually through personal experience and observation of others. The idea of presenting a concert was the perfect opportunity for me to experience the role of director, and to collaborate with other artists in both mediums of Dance and Music. Dance is intimately tied to music and I sought to unify them in a single performance “The ideal relationship is when dance and music appear as one, mutually supportive, enhancing one another.” (Blom and Chaplin 162). To that end I showed musical performance and dance performance separately, existing in silence or in stillness, and an evolving interaction of the two into collaborative co-performance. The contrast created by requiring each performance to stand alone and then rise together gave me a new appreciation of multimedia performance and a respect for the individuals who craft them together seamlessly. Through study of this interaction I developed an overall theme for the concert, however, it was necessary for me to acquire a number of new experiences to develop to the point where I was qualified to choreograph, compose, and direct an entire concert drawing from two complex fields of artistic study.

I have spent a majority of my career exclusively as a performer, taking the creative input from others and catalyzing it with either my body or my voice to produce the desired result. That process began to change when I started working with Rainbow Dance Theatre in 2008 on the piece “Big Bang” which depicts the theorized beginning of the universe, formation of solar bodies, and eventual population and evolution of organic life, moving into the modern human era. Rainbow uses a style of composition which I had never before encountered, wherein the choreographer provides loose instruction and guidance and allows the dancers to construct short phrases and partnering movements on their own. The choreographer takes these individually inspired movements and combines them into larger phrases, eventually developing whole sections of the dance. For Rainbow the choreographer becomes a painter, and the dancers combine and mix new colors for the palette, which the choreographer then uses to paint their work as they envision it. This was my first taste of being involved in the creative process as more than simply a receiver, but to be able to provide input and feel partial responsibility for the created content. I continued this development with the piece “Light Flight” again working with Darryl Thomas and Valerie Bergman for the Rainbow Dance Theatre in 2009, however my contributions were not significantly different than in the previous year.

Also in 2009 I began the 'composition sequence' of classes which had a significant impact on my understanding of the relationship between the choreographer and the performer. My most significant experience relating to composition class was working with Allie Boyden to choreograph a duet. I discovered that choreographing partnering movement came incredibly easily to me. I would manipulate Allie, and she would provide physical feedback, using proprioception we formed a give and take which allowed us to instantly recognize the other person's movement. Simply being aware of the movement we were involved in gave us a greater sense of how it would be viewed by the audience, which gave us the ability to craft their focus as though we were seeing it from the outside.

At the time I did not know it but I was entering a state of creativity known as "Flow" where I had instant feedback on my senses of the success and viability of creative action (Csikszentmihalyi 111). Suddenly coming up with eight counts of movement was not a complicated and repetitive task fraught with frustration and fiddling, but instead became a burst of movement cemented into crafted composition. Everything we did, from a tiny push that grew into a rolling, pulling sustained dive and catch became worthy of inclusion in our piece. The hours spent in studio coming up with movement were far more bearable as well, the social interaction proved refreshing and relieving, and the instant feedback

process “how do you feel about this section” took many of the doubts out of the situation. We showed our piece to other students at various stages of progress and it began to blossom from their additional input. When we finally presented our piece it was well received by our peers and videotaped for our families. I knew at that moment that partnering was to be my specialty for choreography and I would devote all of my energies to enhancing that creative streak.

In the fall of 2009 I discovered to my dismay that working with a group of four dancers as opposed to a simple partnership did not continue to get easier, but instead became much more difficult. I was choreographing for my Group Choreography class which proved to be a greater challenge than I anticipated. I went into the piece with fully formed ideas about phrases and movements. I had an idea already established and I was resistant to it evolving in any way, I just wanted to teach my dancers the phrases and not take their input. That might have even worked if not for the fact that my four dancers were all freshmen with no modern dance experience, only jazz and ballet. Getting the dancers to roll on the ground was a challenge enough and since that is one of the foundational points of my style it proved more than a little difficult to communicate with my dancers. I had pushed my style just a little bit too far in the direction of capoeira and martial arts, which is difficult for other dancers to emulate accurately when their training comes exclusively from classical styles.



To counter the capoeira influence I dug up movement phrases from my previous studies in jazz dance, breaking out movements I hadn't tried in years. It was too late when I finally started down this pathway however, I had already failed to bring the piece together in my mind and was unable to craft the focus, the rhythm and the timing to establish patterns which the audience would understand and which I could use to create a through-line in the content. In the end my piece did not reflect my original choreographic vision and the final dance was pushed into production before it was really ready. I learned from that experience that ego has no place in the studio. I assumed going into the project that because my dancers were young that they would be unable to contribute and that I would have to do all the work. I treated my dancers as though they were props, mechanical instruments who would simply repeat my vision rather than creative individuals ready to contribute, learn, and evolve.

This failure set me back a long ways in terms of confidence in my choreographic skill. I no longer believed that I could easily handle large groups. I began to believe that choreography was actually not among my skills and that I should rethink my entire thesis, perhaps I should base my studies on an aspect of dance and technology for example. It was around this time that I started coming to the studio and meditating on dance. I would bring in a piece of research for my thesis, new reports on the capabilities of Microsoft's new Kinect sensor might

inspire me to explore how the sensor could pick up movement in a theatre space, how the signal could be transferred to the projector, and how I could make it a unique and interesting experience for the audience. Sometimes I would bring in a piece of poetry and use that as my inspiration. In these cases I would read it to myself as I performed a body clearing exercise from somatics and the Bartinieff fundamentals and then just move for hours, exploring new ways of expressing the same idea. This was when I began to firmly establish a style, a flow, a oneness and wholeness to my movement which I would never lose again. I incorporated my life, my breath, my training, and my whole body into the movement, acting as though they were connected in an unbroken manner; one became indistinguishable from the whole. This began my journey back to the creative state of "Flow" (Csikszentmihalyi 84) I didn't really get my confidence back just from these exercises. I had no idea what I was doing, if it was any good or not, or if I was just making up random movements in the studio with no real world practicality.

In the spring of 2010, an idea that Professor Darryl Thomas and I had discussed for a few years became a reality. Working with the student dance officers Darryl created an informal spring concert where any experimental works of dance that a student had in mind could be presented. The audience would not judge you or boo you out of the room, we would be patient and accepting,

people were encouraged to bring their choreographic ideas to the table and to make dance happen. The day before the concert Darryl contacted me and asked me if I wanted to be a part of the concert, if I had a solo ready to present, to which I replied that I did not, but that I would get back to him later that day. I set myself in the studio with some inspiration and a costume idea and produced a working solo in one hour, three and a half minutes in length. Music set to Imogen Heap's "Halleluiah", a breathing intro, setting the stage for an awakening and return to reality for the character. I created the piece in honor of my close friend Kaitlin Bauld who was entering critical knee surgery at the time that I choreographed the solo. The character in the piece was bound at the knee and unable to move freely, never able to bend that leg but under pressure to move on it without aid. I explored some of the phrases that I used working from the idea of limitation that Professor Sue McFadden had introduced us to in Composition Two. This choreography was built upon pent up frustration and worry that my own choreography wasn't good enough. I had something that needed to be danced about and it simply flowed out of me. I set the piece in only an hour because I think it had already been choreographed somewhere in the incubation of the creative process in my mind and simply needed to be taught to my body. I showed the piece for the informal concert and Kaitlin immediately requested that it be turned into a duet for the fall concert later that year.

Suddenly I had my confidence back as a composer of dance. I felt that my fiasco of fall 2009 must have simply been an isolated incident and that I would be able to move past it and begin choreographing new material. In the fall of 2010 I was selected by Guest Artist Maurice Watson to be part of his piece “Epiphany” which would be presented at the American College Dance Festival in Moscow, Idaho. When I began working with Maurice he had phrases already set that he taught the group and we enjoyed learning. One day I was in the studio on my own warming up before rehearsal started. I was rolling and flipping, diving, exploring movements as actively as possible, but with a degree of restraint and compassion as my inspiration. Maurice came into the studio and watched my improvisation for about 15 minutes. When I was done I was out of breath, having poured in a great deal of my creative energies as well as pushing the limits of my physical capabilities. Maurice came up to me and said “I want you to be my soloist. You’re going to do some of that shit you do, I don’t mean to call it ‘shit’ but I don’t have a word for it and I can’t do whatever it is, You’re going to do that as the introduction to the piece in a spotlight.” I don’t think I’ve ever felt quite so honored and terrified in the same moment. It was certainly a new emotional experience. Me? The Soloist? Was he kidding? I had never been the soloist in anything related to dance, I had performed pieces of choreography that I had

done as an individual, I had been an important part of duets, but I had never been a featured soloist in a work of dance.

As it turned out Maurice was not kidding in the least. He wanted me to fill the first minute and a half of the dance with my own improvisation. He gave me guidance and landmarks where he wanted the choreography to remain the same as it coordinated with the music and the movement of the other dancers, but he gave me incredible creative freedom. This was my first look at a true symbiosis between a choreographer and a performer. He wanted me to be the composer of my own phrase, but as choreographer he would direct me and manipulate my composition in such a way that it was appealing to the audience and coordinated with the overall theme of the piece. I was able to witness all four integral parts of dance come together in one. I finally began to understand the role of the Choreographer. The Choreographer acts as a Director to coordinate the movement of the dancers, to organize the phrases and manipulate them together as the audience would see them to craft a visual presentation. The Choreographer is also the composer, creating the phrases and organizing the movements of the dancer, or providing guidance for an improvisation. Lastly, the Choreographer is the performer, both in the metaphysical sense that it is their work and energy being put forth on stage, and insofar as they must see through the eyes of their dancers, see what energy the performer can take and use to

expand the phrase. When the piece was finally performed at the American College Dance Festival it had experienced significant changes during the rehearsal process. My understanding of the solo choreography had gone through a transformation and instead of simply being myself performing Maurice's choreography, I included my own expression in every movement. I became responsible for an artistic interpretation and expression of the artistry which Maurice originally set as movement. This symbiosis led to the piece becoming something more powerful and moving for me than it ever could have had it remained separate.

At the time I thought that "Epiphany" would be my crowning achievement at Western and that I could possibly write my thesis on the movement exploration which I undertook with Maurice. This was until the fall of 2011 when I was introduced to the next Guest Artist Joel Schnee, an internationally award winning choreographer who had served as the premier choreographer of some famous German theatres, and had worked with great figures such as Martha Graham. Joel approached me and asked me to be the soloist for his piece, declaring his intention to craft the piece around me. This was terrifying to me. Acting is my performance weakness and committing to facial expression when I am in the midst of physical exertion has never been a strong point for me. Joel was an extremely theatrical choreographer and told us all as much before the

process began. This piece proved to be a similar challenge to Maurice Watson's "Epiphany" in that Joel expected me to be responsible for sections of the solo choreography and wanted to use my phrases for work with the whole chorus. I felt that I was finally beginning to understand the Choreographer from the perspective of the Performer, but I needed to understand the Choreographer from the other side.

Consulting with Professor Darryl Thomas about my options for a senior project I decided that I had a desire to not only perform, but to also choreograph and direct. My time in the Army reserve officer training corps program had taught me to harness my leadership skills and I wanted to incorporate that into my project, the best way to do so would be to act as a director, one of the major leadership roles available in dance. I also wanted to include my work in music, both through private voice lessons and my four year journey to help create 15 Miles West, Western Oregon's only A Cappella singing group. This was when my Honors Thesis Recital was conceived. The project was an emulation of the music department's senior music recitals, the theatre department's capstone projects, and the dance department's spring dance concert.

I wanted to include the best of my talents, to perform, choreograph, compose, and direct. I would perform in the concert myself, using works of my

own design and to reinterpret works that had been set on me. I would choreograph the movement of my other dancers, the choreography for 15 Miles West, and the staging of other live music aspects. I would compose movement and phrases for the dance work and create vocal arrangements for the singing work. I would direct the entire concert, handling details such as scheduling, technical requirements, theatre space, faculty coordination, piano tuning, seating arrangements, invitations, publicity, funding, costuming, lighting, setup, strike, and anything else that needed directing. This show was mine to win or lose; I decided to go all in.

### **Setting a Program**

When I set out to establish a program for the concert, I imagined a balance between Dance and Music. In the end I had four dance pieces and four music pieces. This is not to say that this did not comeingle, but they could be distinctly grouped by the primary aesthetic of the work presented. The Show Order was

1. "Come Fly With Me" – Solo Voice
2. "Musical Chairs" – Group Dance
3. "If I Ever Fall In Love" – 15 Miles West
4. "Raincoat Story" – Trio Dance
5. "I Do" – 15 Miles West
6. "Impedimenta" – Solo Dance
7. "Feeling Good" – Solo Voice
8. "Utopia" – Duet Dance



This balanced out to a dance-sing-dance-sing arrangement which I thought would be quite favorable. I considered grouping all the dance pieces and all the voice pieces into separate halves of the concert but I wanted to emphasize the collaborative aspects of the concert, the inclusion of dance within music and music within dance. This was further emphasized by having choreography included in 15 Miles West's performances, especially in "If I Ever Fall in Love" and my solo voice performance of "Come Fly With Me" with a quick soft shoe tap section that I improvised on the spot in the spirit of a little bit of Frank Sinatra and a little bit of Fred Astaire. I also chose these songs because they fit into the pop-jazz genre which I absolutely love to sing. There's something about Frank Sinatra singing one of his old songs that gives you the impression that the world really isn't all that complicated after all. I chose to begin the concert with "Come Fly With Me" as an invitation to the audience to figuratively come and fly with me, join me on this journey I'm about to take through the evening and hinting we will both see something new before the show is over. I also chose to include the song "Feeling Good" because of its optimistic perspective. The concert is set in spring after a dark winter, breaking into as the song says "It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life". For this version I chose to depart from the original recording by Nina Simone and adopt some of Michael Bublé's stylistic elements.

Having live music for the Trio and the Solo really made both works come alive. Perhaps I should refer to them as the Quintet and the Trio to be more accurate about the true performance that occurred.

I also had to coordinate with 15 Miles West. The group is in a growing year and so the members changed frequently. I announced the event to the group three months in advance so that people could get back to me about their availability. Only two members of the group could not perform on the night in question so we were able to go ahead with the show. The biggest issue was that the group was just getting done with another show the previous weekend and did not have the time to rehearse any new material, there were only three songs that the group had available that were ready to go. Of those songs I chose “I Do” and “If I Ever Fall in Love” which are both from the A Cappella R&B genre, one by Shia and the other by Boyz II Men.

The four dance pieces of the evening were the real focus of the evening. I spent a great deal of time on the rehearsal and composition process for each piece. Establishing themes and movement for a single piece of dance is a difficult endeavor and I wanted to create four complete works of dance ranging from three minutes in length to nearly nine minutes. The craft involved in creating these pieces is the subject of my next section.

### **“Musical Chairs”**

This piece was the only piece of the evening in which I did not perform. This was an intentional choice in that it would allow me to observe how my own performance of a piece colors my perspective on that piece itself. Do I become more or less involved as I remove myself from the performance, do I feel greater anxiety or less anxiety about the performance since I did not have to actually perform, these are a few of the questions I will ask of the process.

I wanted to create a group piece of at least four dancers for the concert. The main reason I wanted a group piece was to prove to myself that I could choreograph for groups, which had been my previous choreographic failure. Josh Bedlion, my friend and co-founder of 15 Miles West sent me a message on Facebook with a file attached on February 21<sup>st</sup> 2012. I opened the file and it was an .mp3 titled “Teaching Kaitlin How to Beatbox” in reference to Kaitlin Bauld, one of my dancers and Josh’s attempt to teach her vocal percussion or ‘beatbox’ skills. The song features a number of vocal percussion sounds and some melodies mixed together by creating short loops of music and layering them across each other in the same rhythmic pattern. All of the sounds were composed and recorded by Josh Bedlion by himself. I listened to the song a few times and it had so much fun lighthearted energy that it immediately made me want to get up and dance. I wrote back to Josh and asked him if I could use it for my recital and he

agreed. I pulled up the recording in studio by myself and started to dance to it, just letting the beat drive my movement. I came up with a loose skating movement and a simple phrase. This was the easiest dance to come up with a theme for. I wanted the dance to embody play, lighthearted fun that only children really understand. I looked around the room and saw a stack of chairs that Professor Sharon Oberst had been using for rehearsals of “Thoroughly Modern Millie” which she was directing. The first thing I thought of when I saw the chairs was the game of “Musical Chairs” I had played as a child. I picked up four chairs and set them in a square, then I extended them into a line and began to create characters.

The first character is a businesswoman played by Kaitlin Bauld who is absolutely no-nonsense, focused on her work and getting from point A to point B. Her movement is very succinct and direct, no time for subtleties or affectations. Her impatience becomes visible in the dance when she slams her chair down having had enough of being pushed around. Then she moves forward and does the basic phrase, showing how she expects things to be done, hoping the rest of the dancers will catch on and stop fooling around. Instead she becomes caught up in the flow and ends up being just as childish and playful as the other characters. Her costume is a vest and slacks with glasses and tightly bound hair. The second character is the polar opposite of the businesswoman, a child played

by Nancy Sorensen. This character is more concerned with play and having fun than anything else in the piece. In the beginning she doesn't quite get how the whole 'sitting in a chair like a normal person' thing is supposed to go and immediately shifts her weight to slide around in a circle, ending up upside down. She then provokes the businesswoman into becoming stern with all the dancers. Throughout the piece the child character remains aloof and slightly unconcerned. Her costume is tights and leotard with 'arm warmers' and flowers attached to her hair in a skewed manner. The third character is a shy nerdy girl played by Chenise Crockett. This character is very nervous about interacting with or touching the other characters and doesn't like to be seen. She starts off by getting startled by the commotion going on around her and gets pulled into the mix of things. As she gets more comfortable with the play of the dance, she partners with the businesswoman and then goes off on her own to let out her true self, dancing like nobody's watching, right in front of the audience. I liked staging it this way because it plays into the idea of dramatic irony, the audience is having an intimate moment of interaction with this character but she is acting as though she is not being watched by anyone, letting out her inner self. This illusion is destroyed when the rest of the group swings their focus as one unit to look right at her, she reacts and runs away frightened. Her costume is jean shorts, a silly cat shirt, suspenders, her retainer, thick framed glasses and a ponytail. The fourth

character is played by Logan Espiritu and represents a character who is comparatively normal, a little more laid back than most. He gets into an argument over the possession of the last chair and ends up running away from the fight. His costume is a paint stained tank top and baggy sweatpants. The fifth character is a disruptive and aggressive member of the group, ready to bully and push to get her way, played by Christa Dworschak. This character starts the initial movement of the group when she steals the chair from Logan's character. Logan takes the chair back and she pursues him which bumps them all into Kaitlin. At the end of the piece she has gathered all the chairs around herself and attempted to claim them all. Christa wears a grey shirt with black pants and a leather jacket.

The most obvious thematic element that I employed with Musical Chairs was the inclusion of the game Musical Chairs played by the dancers throughout in the multiple conflicts of too many dancers and too few chairs. I played against this theme somewhat when Kaitlin, Chenise and Christa switched places in four chairs for three people, using the section as a foil to really bring the competition over limited resources to life. I also used variation. The same basic phrase is performed four different ways throughout the dance. Once as a solo for Kaitlin in the beginning, again as a trio for Nancy, Logan and Christa alongside Chenise and Kaitlin performing a handholding variant, and finally an arm around waist variant done by Logan and Nancy. My intention was to create a fun and theatrical dance

which could easily demonstrate the use of complex choreographic elements without seeming dry and academic. With that intention in mind the piece was a great success.

### **“Utopia”**

This piece was created in collaboration with Kaitlin Bauld as a co-choreographer. I showed Kaitlin the music and she immediately agreed that we needed to choreograph a piece to it. I had originally envisioned a large group, but Kaitlin saw a duet almost instantly and I was willing to go with that since I had already been conspiring to perform a duet with her but had not definitively chosen the music yet.

The music is “Baba Yetu” by Christopher Tin. The first time I heard “Baba Yetu” was during the main menu of the video game “Civilization IV”. The reaction I had to the music was indescribable, it captured so much beauty and turned it into recorded music. “Baba Yetu” won a Grammy and so far is the only piece of video game music to do so. The song is in the language of Swahili and is a translation of “The Lord’s Prayer” from Christian origins. The piece features a chorus of voices as well as a male solo voice and a duet with a male and a female voice. Accompanying the voices are a full symphony and several of the sections have triumphant crashes of voice, string and brass cascading as one into a crescendo.

The choreography is inspired in part by Ballet, Modern, and African dance. These are three forms which Kaitlin and I have studied extensively in our time at WOU and use throughout our own choreography separately. This piece was developed as a true collaboration, two equals bringing equal contributions to the table. This fits with the theme of the dance, being that of the human struggle to find a place and to find acceptance from neighbors and other participants in the human society. The piece is titled “Utopia” in reference to the idea that humans are naturally capable of achieving a utopic society, and it is up to us to find that capability within ourselves. I find my best traits through dance so I will share that with society and do my best to play a successful part.

### **“Raincoat Story”**

This piece was a trio between Kaitlin, Chenise, and myself. We used Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Air on the G String” as our music played live by Violinist Erin Westfall and Pianist Ashlee Broulette. The piece was inspired by our work together in Joel Schnee’s guest artist piece. After rehearsal we would hang out in the studio and come up with long organic partnering phrases improvisationally. The idea of performing a trio for my recital was brought up by Chenise during ACDF when the three of us shared a hotel room. I began to search for music immediately. I had already considered “Claire de Lune” and “Moonlight Sonata” from the classical genre for a duet with Kaitlin, but I wanted something a little bit



steadier here. This time I found the dance before I found the music. I envisioned a soloist walking from one side of the stage to the other, sometimes interacting with the other dancers but always intensely focused on the far side, always moving forward. Once I had three dancers to work with I knew exactly what to do. There would be a number of duet phrases in the piece, intermixed with brief interactions with the walker in a trio. One dancer would always be walking from point A to point B, but that dancer could be exchanged and replaced. Kaitlin, Chenise and myself would develop phrases to fill in all those gaps and then piece them together at a later time.

The 'Raincoat' part of this dance came from a partnering exercise that Chenise and I worked on in a partnering class at ACDF. We started to refer to the movement as the raincoat and used it when we started work on the trio. We decided to utilize the composition tool of Motif and Variation throughout the piece to develop an evolving theme. The raincoat shows up as the original dragging over the shoulder movement but changed into a lift where Chenise walks on the back of my knees as I walk forward, flowing into another partnering phrase. In another iteration of the motif, Kaitlin walks forward and I walk up behind her on my hands. I put my legs over her shoulders and she drags me with my arms trailing behind. Kaitlin leans forward and I stand up by walking over her. The third variation of the draping is done where Chenise is held by Kaitlin chest to

chest and Kaitlin turns and walks as though unburdened. Kaitlin passes Chenise to me from this movement and I drag her forward in a controlled fall and dive over her slowly. In the last scene of the dance, I pull Chenise over my shoulder one last time and walk over to Kaitlin slowly, the three of us meet up and leave the stage in a blackout.

The music was chosen with careful consideration of a number of factors. The style of the piece being organic contemporary modern dictated that we would not strictly bind the visual rhythms to musical phrasing, there would be no hitting of movements on specific counts. My vision was that the piece would be able to be performed in silence and still convey the same visual themes. The movement itself should be the important part of the dance, using the music to enhance important qualities rather than to contain them. I chose to have the music performed live because by its nature, live performance is unpredictable. If the music is even slightly unpredictable then dancers will not feel bound to a movement occurring on the eighth count of a phrase, but instead will look for musical landmarks to guide them in their journey. I knew that we were slightly ahead of where we needed to be in the performance because I had finished a section with Chenise before the repeat occurred in the music. This realization allowed me to consciously slow down the next section with Kaitlin and to take my time with the moment, to luxuriate in it and to become more eloquent with my

body. The live music made the piece more effective in several ways. Attempting to perform the piece without the Violin was nearly disastrous the morning of the concert. It was supposed to be a run through with everything full tilt and instead proved to be the very worst run of the dance we had ever had. Having the piano alone for accompaniment produced a piece that did not achieve the full effect.

The final decision making tool for me in choosing the music was the meter to which each musical phrase ascribed itself. "Air on a G String" has a walking line on the piano which stays largely consistent throughout the piece while the Violin explores the melody and theme at large. This meant that the music itself could be a brief metaphor for the actions of the dancers, one is constant and continuous while others are exploratory and curious. Choosing to build the music upon the dance gave me the freedom to see the dance in a new light. Instead of binding the dance to specific music, I was giving the dance free reign and asking the music to follow it. What resulted in the piece was an unrestricted movement loosely bound within the musical phrase, as long as it did not stray too far, all was well.

My vision for this piece was that when you are down, those who are close to you will carry you. Each of us was lifted in the piece and each of us lifted each other. Everyone was draped as the raincoat and carried through their hardest

times and in the end we all finished together. Chenise struck upon a perfect theme in one of our last rehearsals, that in fact the piece is a reflection of our time at Western. The three of us weren't always together and in fact sometimes we were in competition with each other but by the end we were constantly supporting each other and making our way through the hardest of times to be an easy path for all. We finished together and looked back over the right shoulder as if to take one last look at the last five years before stepping forward into the next chapter, in the unknown.

### **“Impedimenta”**

This piece was a bit of a stretch, even for me. I pulled from every solo I have ever performed in creating this work. In Latin, *impedimenta* refers to obstacles which impede progress, or the equipment carried by an army. I took the name for both meanings of the word. I reference the gear of a military unit as it is important to my own experience serving as the Cadet Battalion Supply Officer this last year with the Reserve Officer Training Corps as well as to reference obstacles that stood in the way of my personal progress. I meant to display a solo born of my own movement style but weighted in a Sisyphean manner. I push my burden up the hill and reach the highest point but it still rolls down the hill and I must begin anew. Unlike Camus' interpretation of the story however, mine has a singular difference, hope. I have achieved something

beautiful in the mere act of defiance. In attempting to overcome the insurmountable burden before me, I have shown the uniqueness of the human spirit in its willingness to sacrifice itself, to throw away its own survival and wellbeing simply to accomplish its goals. I must achieve victory in this piece, I must push through to the end in spite of that which lies ahead, and never to be disheartened but rather encouraged by that which is behind, be it inches or miles.

In 2009 I developed a piece which studied the movement qualities of the prisoner from Plato's allegory of the cave. I manipulated the focus of the dancer in order to manipulate the focus of the audience. If I remained fixated on a point above the stage, I discovered that the audience would join my stare and observe the object of my attention. In the case of "Impedimenta" I manipulated the focus of the audience in such a way that they might feel their neck get sore from refocusing above the stage, sharing in the Sisyphean nature of my burden.

"Spiegel im Spiegel" was staring me in the face the entire time I searched for music for my solo work. I began my study of the minimalists by examining the works of Philip Glass. Philip Glass was notable in my progression for such works as "In The Upper Room VIII" and the soundtrack to "Mishima" which I utilized twice for choreographic projects. I was fascinated by finding patterns in the Philip

Glass music, understanding where the tracks layered together and when things began to change and when they stayed the same. Over time, Philip Glass' themes grew too similar for my taste, I started to lose the ability to tell them apart at a glance, combined with the tumbling forward speed of many of my favorite tracks I was unable to use them choreographically and knew I needed to move on to greener compositional pastures. I developed an interest in Steve Reich and began to explore his music because it was complex and refreshing after such a long dose of Glass. Reich eventually led me to Arvo Pärt as if it was inevitable, and there I fell in love again with the Minimalist style. "Tabula Rasa" and "Spiegel im Spiegel" particularly captured my imagination, but when I worked in studio the music felt too slow and in many ways constraining because of its lack of speed, in contrast to the way I had been limited by the accelerated tempo of Philip Glass. I didn't feel as though anything was happening that I could explore in the dance space with my body. I put aside the minimalists entirely and ended up branching from Philip Glass into other soundtrack composers such as Hans Zimmer (particularly the "Black Hawk Down" soundtrack), and Ennio Morricone (Particularly his music in "Once Upon a Time in the West"). I was captivated by the music but it felt as though it was already a complete idea, the sentence had already been finished by someone else. The music was capable of telling its own story which I was no more qualified to tell than I had been to create my own story out of Arvo Pärt.

More than two full years after first exploring Arvo Pärt's music I found myself back in his library after a brief exploration of Christopher Tin's soundtrack work in Civilization IV with "Baba Yetu", which I used for the duet. And then "Spiegel im Spiegel" hit me like an avalanche of color and movement. I suddenly understood some of the complexity of the underlying motifs which had before remained aloof. I felt a wave of inspiration overcome me as I knew how each crescendo translated into my body, and suddenly I was not trying to tell a parallel story to the music, my body was the third instrument, for indeed Arvo Pärt had written a trio, but only provided sheet music for the Piano and Violin. For the third part he left it up to me.

Since my performance was a living part of Pärt's Mirror in the Mirror (literal translation) I knew that the music had to be performed live, which was fortunate as I already had a violinist and pianist contracted by the time I set out to begin the solo. I ran into an issue with the music, in that my requirements were different than those which Pärt had originally laid out. I needed a piece of music approximately five minutes in length whereas at tempo the original Pärt score was around eight and a half minutes. I also discovered that I preferred the track with a little bit more vibrato, Pärt had called for no vibrato on the violin (Hillier). I did some arranging and removed the final third of the piece, instead having the Violin and Piano skip ahead to the ending. Fortunately my musicians

were not insulted by my audacity to impede upon Pärt's work and as long as nobody tells Arvo it can be our little secret. My movement was very internalized and as such would have been wasted to set outwardly in choreography. If I knew what I was going to do next that would be enough. I ran into a couple issues during lighting because I did not yet know how some of the sections would go, especially the more improvisational ones, but I set basic phrase changing movements for Cassie to follow on the light board and things all seemed to come together after that.

This Solo was deeply connected to my being as a dancer. I exist in a state of constant improvisation. Do I walk straight over to that side of the room or do I skirt the edges of the room to get there? Will I stand up now or continue to sit? Real life doesn't stop to answer these questions, it has no choreography, no phrases to follow and guide it through its actions, and so why should my dance which is so uniquely about my own personal experience defy reason and logic to constrain itself to set movements? The answer I came up with was that it in fact should not. My greatest skill, the skill of which I am most proud of acquiring at Western is my ability to improvise movement without stopping, to create a stream of consciousness effect using my body. When I truly achieve oneness with my body I feel whole. I feel as though my internal soul and my external expression are in tune and I am able to speak with my true voice. I am able to



share my innermost secrets and emotions, things that I dare not even speak aloud to myself for fear of being overheard. When I dance I do not know fear, it is a substance which bears no purchase upon my soul for I am free when I dance. Thus “Impedimenta” is ironically titled for by the very act of performing this dance about burdens I am free.

## **Production**

I discovered in this project that being a dance director is a complicated and meticulous task which should not be undertaken lightly. I will break this responsibility up into two sections. The first section will deal with responsibilities of a choreographer, the second section will deal with the domain of the director, though the two fields often crossed paths, they are distinct enough to warrant separate consideration.

The Choreographer is responsible for making sure that a dance is a complete work from start to finish:

“When concern is not simply with delight in bodily movement but with a formulated whole, a structured ‘something’ so that the relationship and coherence of the constituent parts becomes of increasing interest and importance” (Redfern 103).

There is a cold and slightly objective side to the choreographer that is strangely separate from the composer. The composer's work is intensely subjective and focused on that iteration of that dance, these specific movements in this moment of time, their interpretation and development. A composer is crafter with a very specific idea in mind, becoming very close and involved in the process. To do their job properly, a choreographer must separate themselves from the dance and act as a curator, taking the best of the composition phase and incorporating it into the movement. That which is bad is cut away, that which is good is kept and polished. The final product should fit together perfectly as though it were crafted from a single block of wood, only the dancers and the choreographer know that it is rambling assemblage of a million splinters of sawdust.

The choreographer is also responsible for the rehearsal process. When I began the project, space in Maple Hall was already very limited due to the number of choreographers working on the department's spring dance concert. I decided to focus on finding times when everyone would be available. Once I had cast the piece I created a Facebook group so that my dancers could instantly communicate with me about their schedules and I could suggest times and have them approve. We settled on eight PM on Thursday nights after Rainbow Dance Theatre was done with the space because everyone was available and so was Maple Hall. After Musical Chairs rehearsal Kaitlin and Chenise would stick around

and we would rehearse the Trio and Duet. The small group also added times on Friday when available and most Saturdays and Sundays. For Musical Chairs I used a much more formalized rehearsal setting. I would put on warm up music and encourage the dancers to warm up when they got there while I went over the phrases I intended to teach the group. I had a list of ideas or concepts that I brought with me to rehearsals which I used as goals for things that I needed to accomplish before the night was over, for example I might have “create two variations on main phrase” or “fix timing issues with chair square”. When I had accomplished my goals I would ask the dancers to do some movement exploration or character development. At the end of each rehearsal I recorded the dance so I could observe the progress of each piece of the dance as it came together.

For the duet and trio I used a much less formalized rehearsal style. I did not want to seem overbearing or controlling since I was creating the works as a collaboration, I wanted my fellow creators to see it as a truly joint effort and become wholly invested in the final product. For the duet, Kaitlin and I would each bring a phrase to rehearsal that we had developed on our own. We would spend some time teaching each other our phrases, then working on a way to combine them. Once we had the phrases built together we would rehearse them repeatedly in order to drive it into our muscle memory. Because of the intense

pacing of the piece and the physically demanding nature of the lifts, there was no room for error. Each run through of the piece had to be precise or one of us could easily suffer an injury that would put the entire process at risk, so we drilled the choreography until it was second nature. When the rehearsal was over we would record the sections.

The rehearsal style of the trio was very informal. I would set up a camera in the corner to record our rehearsal and put on the music in the background, then we would play. Each of us brought our own ideas to the table, we shared responsibility for the movement and when one of us wanted to explore a concept the others would follow. This piece used an improvisational style of development more than a formalized one. Phrases were developed to fit with lines of momentum and force. The choreography followed naturally. All of the phrases were composed but the dance did not get set into a specific framework until it was tied into the live music.

As choreographer I was also responsible for choosing the lighting for the pieces and setting costumes. For costume needs I deferred to the judgment of Kaitlin Bauld as she knows much more about fabric and materials than I do. When it came to lighting the show I deferred to Cassie Malmquist on the light board. I had set moments in which I envisioned the cues happening in the piece,

but I didn't have very specific ideas about what would occur during those key changes. I showed Cassie videos of the pieces as they developed and sat with her in the light booth when we had set up the theatre. Cassie developed light plans and programmed them into the boards, I approved her choices and the lighting was set.

As director, my responsibilities ranged wider than for any other role for the concert. I was responsible for the big picture, did the show actually go on stage or not, but I was also responsible for the tiniest of details relating to the performance. I had to set up a theatre, I contacted Tad Shannon and Darryl Thomas about setting up the theatre, noting what requirements I had of the space, and they approved my use of the space and materials. I coordinated with Cassie about her availability as lighting designer and any equipment that she needed for the show. I set a tech date for Wednesday the twenty third of May to set up the theatre and enlisted several people with tech experience to come and help erect light trees, replace tape lines on the studio floor, construct and place wings and flats, draw the curtains, set up the chairs, move the piano on and off stage, rig electrical wiring, focus the lights, balance sound levels, place tripods and camera angles, get the piano professionally tuned, and manage the theatre seating for the show itself. There were a number of tasks which I could not get help with and had to accomplish on my own however, such as creating a poster

and a program for the event. I used the photographer Brandon Woodard to capture an incredible image that I could use for my poster. I designed the poster in Adobe Photoshop CS5 and the concert program in Microsoft Word. I had the University Print Shop produce 70 posters for me in greyscale and saved money by using my print credits to do so. Once I had the posters I distributed them across campus in accordance with posting guidelines. For the program I bought a stack of card stock paper and ran it through two laserjet printers in the campus computer lab to get eighty programs for the event.

When the show happened it was because of all the different roles I had to play. As a dance composer and choreographer it was my movement that was used throughout the show, as well as my creative control of the implementation and effect of each piece musical and visual. As the performer much of the night rested squarely on my shoulders, had I been too ill or injured to perform for whatever reason, the show would not have happened. I trained my body in rehearsal and technique class, I hydrated and followed proper nutrition guidelines to make certain I was performing at the peak of my physical capabilities and as such set the standard for student solo work. As the director I oversaw the entire operation. I made sure the theatre was set up. I made sure my dancers and musicians and tech staff were there for all dress rehearsals and performance. I handled publicity and made sure there was an audience for the

show. I financially backed the show and paid all necessary costs ranging from paying my accompanists to buying gifts for my performers. Each of these roles represents a challenge to creating a show. Combining these roles into one, making myself responsible for the show's entire success was far more of a challenge than I bargained for. If I had fully grasped the challenge before me at the time of its inception I would likely have chosen a different path. Instead, I chose the more treacherous and less traveled path, and for every bump along that road I have been made stronger. I emerge from this project ready to continue spreading my creative vision. I know the extent of my capabilities and talents far better than before. I hope to direct many more concerts in the future.

## Rehearsal Notes

Notes as of 17 January 2012

**Title: "Occlusion"**

Music "Leave No Man Behind" by Hans Zimmer

Taken from my SDC application: The piece is centered on the method I intend to use for composing the choreography. A lot of the individual movement I have created for myself, what I would call my own style, I create without using my eyes as much as possible. I would have to credit Maurice Watson with helping me to develop this by allowing me to create my own introduction to his piece last year. I started from a place of total blindness, and I only started opening my eyes after I had been working on it for quite a while. Sometimes I did the entire opening solo with my eyes shut (though on stage I wanted to create more of a connection with the audience). I felt as though I was starting in a place of absolute and total darkness, and the only way to learn anything about my environment was to reach out with my other senses and use them to enhance my proprioception. This reaching out translated into the very movement that I was doing, the movement became an expression of this desire to see without seeing.

This Summer I worked with Jo Winner-Ziemer, a friend and a dance student at Cornish teaching at the Metro Arts Inc. kids camp in Portland. Jo wanted to do some blindfold work with the older students, we worked up to it by



teaching them a warm up sequence and eventually asking them to do it with their eyes closed and verbal instructions for as much as they could, eventually we had them wear blindfolds and participate in some of the exercises.

I started working with the blindfold myself and found it to be a different experience than just closing my eyes. It was interesting because I felt more in tune with my other senses and their ability to form a representation of my surroundings. I started setting up a camera and recording myself as I 'explored the space'. I mostly stay close to the ground when working with the blindfold so as to offer myself as much protection as possible, but I move slowly and carefully enough to avoid injury.

I want to combine some of the partnering studies I developed in class from Matthew Lindstrom a professor at Mesa State College with the blindfold work. I feel this is best way I can translate my own personal style onto the bodies of my dancers. This was my biggest concern before in group choreography, trying to explain how my movement was so internal, however, with these tools I hope it will be easier. I've had a few years to further develop my own movement and create something much more codified and definable, which will aid me in choreographing for a group.

Enough about the process, now on the piece itself. I'm taking the advice to create art about what I know, so the piece will largely be about the close bonds between soldiers. Sometimes soldiers are forgotten once they go back to their civilian lives, but other soldiers do not forget them. They work together to help keep each other out of trouble even as they wrestle with their own demons. This made my choice of music almost no question, "Leave No Man Behind" was written by Hans Zimmer for the Black Hawk Down soundtrack, the film deals with the Warrior Ethos of "Never Leave a Fallen Comrade". The dancers may have physical limitations such as the inability to leave the ground, use both feet, or possibly see (depends on a LOT of other factors that still need to be considered in rehearsal) but I plan to have my dancers work in rehearsal with blindfolds for some of the initial movement exploration to let the phrases take shape but then move away from the blindfolds for obvious safety reasons. The idea is that the other dancers will help each other to overcome limitations and prevent them from succumbing to despair, demonstrating the unique bond between the men and women who serve. I have done a good deal of movement exploration myself on this subject but I'm honestly not certain yet as to whether this piece will deal exclusively with PTSD or with the more physical scars of war. I think limiting the scope may enhance the ability to project a message and connect with the audience.

**Title: Civ**

Music “Baba Yetu” Christopher Tin

This piece is about celebration and community. Ever since I first heard this piece of music I knew I wanted to choreograph something to it. I just knew that this was the right way to express something vibrant and athletic while still possessing the refinement of form and grace. Specifically I wanted to create a piece influenced by ballet and African influenced modern. The movement works on an upright plane almost rigidly, very little floor work. The track I have right now to work with is 3:28 so not too long but plenty to work with as there are several diverse sections.

The music itself is a Swahili translation of “The Lord’s Prayer” adding yet another layer to the synergy at play between different styles of dance. There is so much emotion in the music, and though I’ve never tried before to work with Choral arrangements, I just immediately envisioned dance with this music. The piece has a life of its own musically, and it impels my body into motion. It will be a challenge to harness that spirit and bind it to set choreography but this whole thing is about challenging myself with things I haven’t done yet choreographically.

I don't see any reason to have any of the dancers leave the stage for any section. The dancers will tell the story obviously, but I would like certain dancers to 'speak' for the various voices. There are strong male and female solo voices as well as sections with a chorus of voices. I will have a dancer for each voice and the corps working as one voice for the chorus and symphonic parts. I can't even listen to this song right now without wanting to get started, I see so many bodies but I know I will only have 6 at the most. Huge balletic leaps paired with sweeping grounded recoveries and a sense of a flock, all moving as one with the leader, several dancers working in close proximity for one goal.

Actually just found a version of Christopher Tin's original track that I like more than the one I was working with. This is a higher fidelity version compatible to 5.1 surround. Some of the voices are a little different and once the final copy arrives by mail I will have to make a decision as to whether the changes are overall acceptable. Tin is an amazing composer. I first heard of Tin while doing Pandora research several years ago and branching off of minimalist composers Philip Glass and Steve Reich onto the path of Ennio Morricone and Hans Zimmer who took the epic semi-operatic qualities of the minimalists and harnessed them into soundtracks much the way Glass did. From Hans Zimmer soundtracks I heard of Christopher Tin's work with video game soundtracks although I didn't hear Baba Yetu yet, I loved his themes and motifs. When I played the game "Civilization IV"

by Sid Meier, I loaded the opening menu. The game is about the evolving concept of civilization over time, starting in a near prehistoric era, you guide humanities ancestors to the foundation of civilization and through all the ages and epochs to follow, all of humanity's noble struggle captured in a digital game interface may seem a bold concept, but the music they had playing during the opening menu told me all I needed to know about how good the game would be. The song was Baba Yetu. I spent several hours JUST listening to the menu and not moving on to the actual game. I was transfixed by the music's sheer beauty, and not without reason, Baba Yetu is the only piece of video game music to be nominated for and win a Grammy.

**Title: Untitled**

Music "La Belle et le Bad Boy" MC Solaar

Continuing a motif of music I have been inspired with for years, MC Solaar's 'La Belle et le Bad Boy' is an interesting piece. I always envisioned it in much the same way as Baba Yetu in terms of flow, but not in structure or composition. The piece will be a duet and a chase/interest/disinterest love saga. For this piece I would like to explore the hybridization of hip-hop with balletic and modern movements. Not the hard hitting side of hip hop but more of a smooth

laid back style. Very in tune with the beat and the flow of the music without being overtly controlled by it.

I heard this track several years ago on a CD a friend gave me. I wanted to choreograph to it almost instantly. I envisioned working with more dancers for this but I would like to limit the number of group pieces. I recognized the lyrics from my French language studies, but haven't taken the time to fully translate it. I will translate it if it's going in the concert.

**Title: Intertwined**

Music "I Will Follow You Into The Dark" As performed by Gavin Mikhail

I first began exploring this piece in Moscow, Idaho at the American College Dance Festival in 2011. I was looking for something to improvise to while the studio was unoccupied, and the track came up as an acoustic version of the song I was looking for. I played it and was instantly consumed by the haunting nearly hopeful interpretation of the melody line. My contemporary Dantzel Cherry was working with me at the time and we turned the piece into a semi contact based improvisation. The themes of rolling and sliding were of paramount importance throughout the improvisation. There was an audience and requests for an encore.

Several months later teaching in Portland with Jolene Winner-Ziemer I worked on the piece again as a contact improv study. This time we performed it for the class we had been teaching. This is the point at which I began to give serious consideration to using the music for a performance. I will be performing the piece with Kaitlin Bauld, who has already agreed. Kaitlin and I have choreographed Duets before and I am excited to see the latest product of our collaboration.

**Update Monday January 30, 2012**

I have set two recordings in Studio so far in order to isolate certain movements and sequences for later use in choreography. This is one of my most useful choreographic tools because it allows me to work from my computer when I don't have access to the studio. I record an entire session and later I edit the sections I wish to keep. Previously on days when I recorded I would warm up, work for a bit, and then try to set up the camera and perform whatever movements I had picked out for the camera. Most often I would be nervous when I was conscious of the camera's presence, or I would be tired from already having worked too hard, or I couldn't get the movement right again. There were a lot of factors that affected my ability to succeed with this recording method. I solved the problem by getting a larger memory card. Now I can leave the camera recording for an entire half hour session or more and then download it while I

take a break before I start up again. This has allowed me to find some of my best movements when I review the footage. Focusing on the details, I can see the exact part of the sequence that was interesting, and I can slow it down and watch feet, hands, fingers, shoulders, pelvic alignment and determine the features that could be improved technically or made more interesting.

My improvisational method does not lend much ability to later analyze my movement without a recording. I don't remember much of the movements simply because of their place of origin. To begin, I enter a meditative state, clearing my mind of outside thoughts and either focusing on an emotional state or story, or specifically focusing on nothing. I then prefer to move slowly, beginning on the ground with some fluid floorwork and working up to standing and locomotive movements. During the beginning phase my eyes are closed to enhance my proprioception and allow me to dance from internal stimuli rather than external force. When I dance in a meditative state it is almost as though I am in a trance, I am not actively conscious of my actions but rather participatory in them. It is almost as though my creative soul is being directly outpoured through my body. I feel less important and part of something greater. It is difficult to describe, but the results I get are satisfying.



The video project is developing nicely. Ian Boyd has consulted his boss in the WOU Video Productions department about using some of the campus resources to accomplish the final video and she has agreed to not only allow us to use the high end editing software, but also to allow us limited access to the professional quality HD cameras. This is a huge deal as it will make the difference between this video being something fun to post on YouTube, and something that can be presented in a professional performance setting. I can not only use this as part of my senior project incorporating the bridge between Dance and Technology, but also as a potential audition video in the future to help me get professional work in Dance. I have yet to finalize locations, but I have decided that there should be four or five very distinctive backgrounds. The first location should be rural, farmland or open countryside, somewhere here in the central Willamette valley near to Monmouth. The second location will be woodland, somewhere actually in the coastal temperate rainforests of Oregon, although it may be difficult to find a clearing in which to dance, trees blocking the shot may actually add to the effect. The third location I would like to use will be aquatic, most likely in the surf or on a rock jetty by the ocean. My fourth location will be inside the city in a crowded or at least partially public place, if people are in the shot I will have them sign a release, I know the standard procedures. The last

location I would like to use will be industrial, preferably abandoned, disused rail lines or factories are the images I have in my mind.

The piece will actually discuss a topic from a geography class I took when I was much younger that focused on the importance of place and its ability to affect the actions that take place there. My hypothesis in this situation is that the movement is more important than the background, since multiple backgrounds will be used in the filming. However, all of my shots will be in Oregon and I hope to understand whether a community of place can be defined by a geographic border, that is to say whether a place can be defined plurally as Oregon and yet still retain the purity of its own singularity in the face of a shifting visual tapestry of movement as created by myself the dancer. Probably too academic of a topic, but one of my other goals is to show the beauty of a soul free in its expression and capability to emote and move through space. I want to choreograph something joyful and celebratory rather than my typical dark and nearly brooding subjects.

**Update Monday April 3, 2012**

Concert date has been set for the 25<sup>th</sup> of May. Suddenly the entire concert seems more real than it did before. Dancers have been contacted and rehearsal schedules are developing. Over Spring Break I spent several rehearsal days in the

studio developing and exploring movements. I improvise well, and when I record that improvisation I see interesting movements, but I need to stop using this as a creative process. The time for initial movement studies and explorations has passed, there is no longer enough time before the concert to still be exploring such things. What is working most effectively for me now is to build phrases from the movements I have developed. I have two working phrases for Occlusion, and I am definitely changing that title. It's not about the blindness of objects hidden from sight, it's about being able to lean on someone when you need to. I need to get dancers on that piece in studio immediately because what I've been working on in studio needs to be put on someone else's body. I would like to have all the dances entering the rehearsal phase by the end of this month.

The new piece I conceived over the break is shaping up faster than any of the others, but I'm worried about how it might be taken as imitative. I watched Sara McIntyre's rehearsal last night and realized that some of the awkwardness of Dancer #2 might be perceived as being inspired by the awkwardness of her situations especially since she uses a bench. I would like to think that my work is completely original in nature but to be honest I know I pull inspiration from everything that I see, so there is likely some conceptual influence from the pieces of her dance that I witnessed at first preview. I can fix it though. I'll just have #2 be in her own little world rather than trying to bring her weirdness to any of the

other dancers. Besides, that was my word for her, weird, not awkward. Awkward situations develop when one or more person is uncomfortable with the way a situation is developing, but obviously not in a violently disruptive manner. #2 is not defined by her interactions with the other dancers, she is defined by her inability to sit still in the chair, or in a manner socially prescribed for sitting in chairs. The other dancers might develop awkward situations based upon their interaction with her, but I want to de-emphasize that if I can. #2 may remain in her own little world for the entire dance, I haven't decided yet if she will interact with the others or if she will just stay in her chair and not participate, there may not be time to develop it all. #1 needs more development. I can't just leave it at 'businesslike' that term is far too broad and really has little meaning. Abrupt, not confrontational but stubborn, unwilling to be moved. #4 and #5's conflict will broil over into her space and she will not be budged. They will climb on her and she will get up and move over to #4's old chair when she gets tired of it. The group phrase I'm working on still needs development.

I read part of Rebecca Chad's thesis again today, wanted to get a feel for some of the things I need to do to prepare my actual thesis document and I finally hit the nail on the head for what this concert is about for me. It is about the dynamics of performance creativity and compositional creativity. For years I have been only a performer, never the choreographer or composer/arranger. I was the instrument

through which someone else's creative voice found purchase in reality. This does not mean I was not involved on a personal level in the creative process. I exercise a creative license in my movement and my interpretation of the movements that are given to me as the choreography. It has begun to develop for me in the creation of solo works beginning with Maurice Watson's guest artist piece Epiphany in 2011. That piece was a catalyst for me in many ways, leading to new interpretations of my own movements and a refining process of my movement style. The creative freedom I have been given over the years as a performer and participant in the rehearsal process has expanded every year. In the beginning I was too shy to contribute, afraid of how my movements would be taken by others. Five years later I am consulted on entire sections by the choreographer. My input is valid because they trust me to interpret their movements and come up with something suitable.

And I have discovered that this creative process is completely separate from the side of being the actual choreographer. I am also discovering how the creative process is affected by the act of choreographing oneself into one's own work. It is incredible. I feel like I could write a book just about the differences between the individual creative acts of dance. I will settle for a thesis.

**Update 10 April 2012**

First Rehearsal of the “Chair Dance” was last Thursday and was very useful. Set one phrase, Set introduction, Set closing phrase, created Kaitlin solo/absorption thematic tie in. I might name it “Bus 56 (Musical Chairs)” but that was just a random thought I had this morning. Musical chairs named after the thematic element of the rivalry over four chairs and five people. Bus 56 after the main bus stop in town I used to take to get to dance class as a kid, to deal with the idea that these are five people forced together by circumstance and not by social instrumentation.

I have a section established for after the chair placement introduction, but I don't know specific movements for that section. I need to construct an entrance for Christa and then have her begin to interact with Logan. I want the leaving the chair behind to be organic but I still need to make it clear that the chair is a desired commodity. Ok, so I will have Nancy shift one chair over so that she can take advantage of the now open chair. No, Chenise is still going to crawl away with her chair so Nancy will just slide her chair over to make a fort of two chairs with hers and Logan's. Christa slides Logans chair out from under him and laughs at him while he looks up at her from the ground, then he rolls over and back to his feet. He steps forward to lay back in the chair and Christa does an around the back switch to take his chair again while Logan lands on his butt. Now he gets

somewhat riled and takes the chair back from Christa, points away from her and yanks the chair out. Christa gets mad and the chase ensues. This is when Kaitlin finally gets involved to break up the chase and get them to stop acting like children.

At this point I'm not sure if the "Leave No Man Behind" piece is actually going to happen or not. One of my dancers broke her ankle so I'm either going to have to rechoreograph it for 4 or find someone else. I'm not too keen on finding another dancer since I only have a month and a couple weeks. I also don't have the dance fully fleshed out yet and don't know if I have time to work on a full 6 minute composition.

For the other pieces however, I met with Kaitlin and Chenise and established some basics for our trio. We are going to work on a phrase with each other, and somehow incorporate the person who is still walking across the stage to make it more fluid. We also settled on "Air for G string" by Bach for the music. I'll have to see if Cassio is going to be available that night for accompaniment and if he would mind performing it so we can have live music to enhance the piece even further. Chenise and I will use the phrase from ACDF and expand upon it. I would also like to think of using that kind of partnering for the rest of the piece and building upon it. The form calls for a lot of weight sharing, push and pull,

constant momentum building one movement into the next, I pull Chenise and she runs past me and leaps as I push her higher into the air, as I guide her down she is already falling and I am catching her which leads her to roll forward. It is one movement, one impetus, I would like to continue that.

Kaitlin showed me a phrase which I recorded for our duet. I want to be able to keep the energy high for our piece, without burning out in the first 1:30 seconds of music. It has to do justice to the music in a lot of ways, more so than any of the other pieces I'm undertaking here.

The music is a whole different story I'm tackling this weekend with Chano.

#### **Update 19 April 2012**

Compiling my notes for rehearsal tonight. Realized that "Leave No Man Behind" is just simply not going to happen at this time. I still love the concept and all the work I put into preparing it, but it would have had to be a piece for the Spring Dance Concert in terms of its scale and ambition. I cast it, worked through the movement, established the themes, costumes, and characters, spent hours researching PTSD and the effects it has on the group dynamic between soldiers, sought inspiration from the films "The Messenger" "The Hurt Locker" "Black Hawk Down" "Brothers" "Saving Private Ryan" "Born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July" and others to try and understand how traumatic stress has been portrayed in media



before, so that I might be able to establish a new dialogue on the subject without repeating what has already been said too many times. And yet, at the end of the day, it just isn't there. I don't feel the factors necessary coming together for me to establish the work on stage. I don't even know why it's not coming together for me but it really doesn't feel ready... I think I need to talk to someone about this and see if there's anything I can do to get it off the ground or if I just need to let it sit.

Musical Chairs is making progress, but I just realized that I don't have all the chairs that I need in Maple anymore! We looked around for them but couldn't find them. I will contact the facilities people and see what they can do for me.

I will also need to contact the facilities people about seating for the event. I need two racks worth of metal folding chairs, and some volunteers to help me set them up on Thursday May 24<sup>th</sup>. I will also need two ushers for the event, and maybe a house manager to direct people on where to sit. I need to coordinate with Cassie and see if she has any tech friends who would be willing to help with the set up for Maple. Actually, just e-mailed Cassie to check in and figured I can probably set up the wings in Maple and make it theatre ready with just one other person to help. Lighting and wiring of everything will be a bit trickier but I will ask

Darryl what he thinks I need to do for that and he will point me in the right direction. I would like to have rehearsals every day for those two weeks after SDC and then finish it off with the concert, so I can build the theatre after rehearsal starting Tuesday or Wednesday, show some of the works to the Comp II class and any other faculty available at that hour. Need to design the poster, write the programs, create invitations and get them out.

Music is going well. I will be singing "Feeling Good" and bought the new sheet music for it this week. I showed it to Sherry during Voice Lesson and she loved it. I also coordinated with Terra Hurdle and Erin Westfall to get them to play piano and violin for the concert. I am getting a version of "Air for the G string" by Bach which I think will be perfect for the trio with Kaitlin and Chenise. I am also going to check out "Your Song" by Elton John and the modern Ellie Goulding version for Chenise during her Solo if she decides to go ahead with it. I am looking for one other solo song to sing, leaning towards "Come Fly With Me" Frank Sinatra style. I want 15 Miles West to sing two songs. Right now I am thinking about Uprising because I love it and there's choreography. However some of the newer songs would also be great because we've never performed some of them before and it would be great to go out with them. I haven't made up my mind about whether I would want to sing a solo or not because it would take a lot more out of me than this concert is already going to.

I will ask the guest artist dancers if they would be willing to perform the piece at my concert during rehearsal this Friday. I think it will be good for my thesis to show the development between individually choreographed movement and movement choreographed by an outside choreographer. I'll see if they're all available and if not, then maybe I will go to Nancy and see if her piece is available. Considering Academic Excellence is the next week for both of these pieces, I think it would be appropriate to keep them ready to perform. I'm running out of time now but I'll get back to this update later because there's still a lot to discuss.

**3/7/2012**

**Duet: Kaitlin and Ermine**

0:00 K & E standing on opposite sides of stage, think "Afternoon of a Faun" choreography where two dancers are in one room performing duet but neither of them see each other.

K start standing SL facing audience, slow balancing movement, controlled. Music change at 0:22 leads to more turning and begin locomotor, end by rolling to ground facing away from audience.

E contrast K movement from the ground but facing away from audience Sitting USR.

\*note maybe stillness is right for here

0:56 Intro done

0:57 first verse begins

E face audience, Move DSR, hand clasped to heart (love of mine). R hand swings around full circle of body, duck head and torso out of way to finish rotation and allow to pull downward into seated turn (someday you will die, but I'll be close behind) Leg swing twice Darryl style to pull into reverse knee spin toss to land supported by upper body on hands (I'll follow you into the dark). Push backwards on hand slide away walking with feet alligator kick style (no blinding light). Swing upper body over to other side, leap backwards flip up on R hand to standing, swing body circle deep lunge L side, come to standing sweeping L leg kick around in turn to backwards diveroll roll to stand.

K face away from audience groundwork etc or maybe leave stage?

01:30 first verse over (Chorus1)

Unison section, to be choreographed, will repeat with variations

1:55 First section done

2:01 Second verse starts

K solo,

E watch or leave

2:31 second verse over (Chorus2)

2:59 second section ends

3:05 third verse starts

K&E Duet section, same movements, intensive partnering and all the awesome you can stand

3:45 third verse over (chorus3)

Chorus with variations and partnering, standing close together now.

4:24 outro 14 seconds

**3/29/2012 Notes**

“Leave no man behind” – Hans Zimmer – 6:18

PTSD broken soldiers return home

Leader – holding it together, lead soloist – wearing jeans and grey t-shirt [Kaitlin Bauld]

Battle 1 – Needs someone to lean on – Jean torn full length with green tank [Logan Espiritu]

Battle 2 – Leans on Battle 1 – grey cargos with green T shirt [Sam Bredahl]

Lone Wolf – Has trouble accepting comradeship – torn jeans and jungle fatigue jacket [Chenise Crockett]

Casualty – Falling apart – shorts and tank top [Kaytlin Wyatt]

Beginning L solo, rising and falling, maybe a light of some kind lit on stage, begin very internal and then reach out and begin locomotor at 0:58 with strings.

0:58 locomotive section, moving around stage to explore environment. Other dancers are stopped to watch Leader

1:38 BB work way across stage low supportive partnering

2:13 BB joins L for continuation of support and connection

3:30 section with L BB and LW

**4/1/2012 Notes**

#1 – Kaitlin (All Business, no nonsense,

#2 – Nancy (WEIRD, doesn't like to 'sit' in the chair, but will do just about anything else with it)

#3 – Chenise (Very Shy, very nervous, wide eyed, twitchy, apologetic, sits on the edge of the chair)

#4 – Logan (Relaxed, just trying to veg out on the chair)

#5 – Christa (Trying to steal a chair, especially #4's)

0:01 to 0:09 Four chairs walk out and set up on beat. Sit on 'snap snap' on 0:09

0:26 #5 pushes #4 out of chair and sits there looking clever and coy

0:34 #4 and #5 arguing over chair bump into #3 and knock out of chair

## Program

### Special Thanks

*Without the support of these people, this concert would not have been possible*

*Cassie Malnquist (Lighting Designer, Technical Director)*

*Tad Shannon (WOU Professor, Technical Consultant)*

*Brandon Woodard (Photography)*

*Samantha Bredahl (House Manager)*

*Sharon Oberst (WOU Dance Professor, Academic Advisor)*

*Sue McFadden (WOU Dance Professor)*

*Amy McDonnell (WOU Dance Professor)*

*Deborah Jones (WOU Dance Professor)*

*Darryl Thomas (WOU Dance Professor, Thesis Advisor, Mentor)*

*Gavin Keiliks (WOU Professor, Honors Program Director)*

*Sherry Alves (Voice Teacher)*

*Josh Bedlion (Composer, 15 Miles West Co-Founder)*

*Jonny Herrick (Arranger, 15 Miles West Co-Founder)*

*Feliciano Garcia (15 Miles West current musical director)*

*15 Miles West*

*Danny Black (Dance Teacher, for showing a 10 year old that Boys can do Ballet too)*

*Logan Espiritu (Dancer)*

*Nancy Sorensen (Dancer)*

*Christa Dworschak (Dancer)*

*Chenise Crockett (Dancer, Co-Choreographer)*

*Kaitlin Bauld (Dancer, Co-Choreographer)*

*Susan, Ermine, and Elysia Todd (Family, Unending Source of Inspiration and Support)*

*www.facebook.com/BrandonWoodardPhotography*

## ERMINE TODD HONORS THESIS RECITAL

Friday, May 25<sup>th</sup> 2012, 7:30 PM

Maple Hall, Western Oregon University

### "COME FLY WITH ME"

*Composed by Jimmy Van Heusen, lyrics by Sammy Cahn*  
*Piano – Ashlee Broulette, Voice – Ermine Todd*

### "MUSICAL CHAIRS"

*Music composed and recorded by Josh Bedlion, WOU Alumni*  
*Dancers: Chenise Crockett, Christa Dworschak, Logan Espiritu, Nancy Sorensen, Kaitlin Bauld*  
*Choreographed by Ermine Todd with contributions from the dancers*

### "IF I EVER FALL IN LOVE"

*Original by Shai, Arrangement by Jonny 'Shay' Herrick*  
*15 Miles West*

### "RAINCOAT STORY"

*Music "Air on the G String" Johann Sebastian Bach*  
*Piano – Ashlee Broulette, Violin – Erin Westfall*  
*Choreographed and Performed by Chenise Crockett, Kaitlin Bauld, and Ermine Todd*  
*Costumes by Kaitlin Bauld*

### "I DO"

*Original by Boys II Men, Arrangement by Jonny 'Shay' Herrick*  
*15 Miles West*

### "IMPEDIMENTA"

*Music "Spiegel Im Spiegel" Arvo Pärt*  
*Piano – Ashlee Broulette, Violin – Erin Westfall*  
*Performed by Ermine Todd*

### "FEELING GOOD"

*Lyrics and Music by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley*  
*Piano – Ashlee Broulette, Voice – Ermine Todd*

### "UTOPIA"

*Music "Baba Yetu" by Christopher Tin (With Permission)*  
*Choreographed and Performed by Kaitlin Bauld and Ermine Todd*  
*Costumes by Kaitlin Bauld*

### PERFORMERS

*Dancer – Christa Dworschak*

*Dancer – Logan Espiritu*

*Dancer – Nancy Sorensen*

*Dancer – Chenise Crockett*

*Dancer – Kaitlin Bauld*

*Dancer – Ermine Todd*

*Piano – Ashlee Broulette*

*Violin – Erin Westfall*

*15 Miles West*

*Tenor 1 – Jake Yeakum*

*Tenor 1 – Ryan Hess*

*Tenor 2 – Andrew Forquer*

*Tenor 2 – Ermine Todd*

*Baritone – Feliciano Tencos-Garcia*


*Bass – Andrew Jenson*

*Lighting Designer – Cassie Malnquist*

*Ermine Todd will be graduating from Western Oregon University on June 16<sup>th</sup> 2012 with a Bachelor of Science in Dance. As a Dance Major Ermine was privileged to serve as student President and Vice President of the department, work with three guest artists and was a delegate to the American College Dance Festival five consecutive years. Ermine is an Honors Thesis Candidate having fulfilled all of the requirements of the Honors Program. Tonight's concert represents the fruition of three years of research devoted to Ermine's Thesis exploring the relationship of music and dance in relation to the Performer, the Composer, the Choreographer, and the Director. Ermine is a founding member of the A Cappella group 15 Miles West and has been a contributing group member for the last four years, including their appearance at the International Competition of Collegiate A Cappella in 2011. Ermine will receive his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2012 and will report to Ft. Rucker, Alabama to attend Flight School as an Aviation Officer. Ermine will continue to pursue performance opportunities his whole life.*



Poster



**Ermine Todd**

**Presenting an Honors Thesis Recital**

**Sponsored by the WOU Dance Department**

**Friday May 25th 7:30 PM**

**Maple Hall**

Contact [etodd07@wou.edu](mailto:etodd07@wou.edu) for questions

"If you have a disability that may require some accommodation in order to participate in a Western Oregon University activity, please notify the Office of Disability Services at 503-838-8250 or [ods@wou.edu](mailto:ods@wou.edu) at least 72 hours in advance."



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